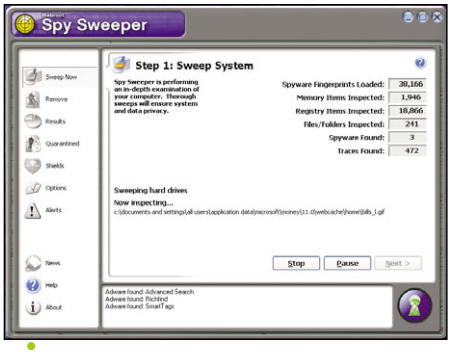
by Kevin Savetz

Webroot Spy Sweeper 3.2



Spy Sweeper 3.2
$29.95 (one-year subscription)
Webroot
www.webroot.com

My PC had been acting erratic, leaving me to wonder if Windows was being finicky or something else was at work. This was the perfect time to test Spy Sweeper, which aims to get rid of software that tracks you, displays unwanted ads, or that will make your PC "0wned."

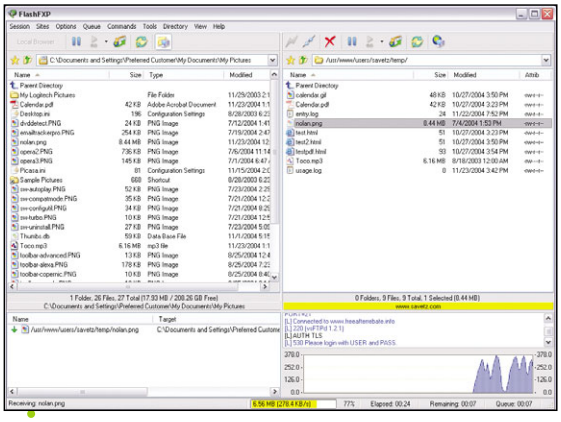
SS scans your computer's memory, Registry, and hard drive for suspect files it compares against its continually updated database of known spyware. The app is thorough but not speedy; it took 28 minutes to sift through 25GB of files on my PC, listing 71 cases of spyware. Of those, however, all but three were cookies, primarily for ad networks. These are annoying but not typically worth losing sleep over and not what most people consider spyware. The other three hits were more notable, as they were programs that can hijack Web searches and Internet settings. SS quarantined these and deleted them entirely with my approval.

SS also offers shields to prevent programs from changing your Internet Explorer home page and favorites, keeping new spyware from being installed, and warning you when new items are added to your startup routine. A host file editor also makes it simple to block all traffic from ad networks, not just cookies. This works for all your browsers, not just IE. With this feature activated, an error message or missing image icon replaces the ads.

A scheduling function lets SS perform a full system sweep or just check periodically known spyware folders. It can also search for baddies at a certain time and day or every time you shut down the PC. The combination of always-on shields and scheduled sweeps did a good job of keeping spyware at bay in my testing.

No single program has proven able to ward off all spyware, but Spy Sweeper does an admirable job. The polished interface makes the process easy, and the shields make maintenance more or less invisible. ▲

IniCom Networks FlashFXP 3.0.2



FlashFXP 3.0.2
$25 (shareware)
IniCom Networks
www.flashfxp.com

If you run a Web site, you need an FTP utility to move files to and from remote hosts. FlashFXP provides powerful file-transfer features but at a sacrifice of ease of use.

FlashFXP's UI is typical of many FTP utilities, in that it displays local files in one pane and remote files in another. You can upload or download files (without size limits) by dragging them from one pane to the other, queue transfers for later, and resume interrupted transfers. The app performs other routine file tasks, such as renaming, deleting, and changing permissions for files. You can also view remote files and edit remote text files.

FlashFXP offers plenty for power users, and this version adds many features, including speed improvements and the ability to display remote file-creation times in your time zone. The app's transfer speed graph is also handy, as is the ability to selectively transfer files based on file and directory names. In addition, a FTP File Search tool can find all the files on a remote site that match the name, date, and file size you specify.

FlashFXP allows for transfers between two FTP servers without passing the files though your PC. This potentially useful feature didn't work for me, however, giving me instead terse error messages with no real explanation of what might be wrong. (It turns out that FTP servers must be configured to allow site-to-site transfers.) Similarly, the program offers several methods of secure connections, which is important for keeping passwords from being transmitted in the clear. I couldn't get this to work, possibly because the FTP servers didn't support this function, but the program and documentation provided very little troubleshooting information.

FlashFXP's cluttered UI and difficulty performing some tasks, such as site-to-site transfers, was frustrating. Although the app is a capable FTP utility that adequately does the job most of the time, it's hard to fully love it given the myriad of other capable FTP clients out there. ▲

CPU Ranking: 0 = Absolutely Worthless 2.5 = Absolutely Average 5 = Absolutely Perfect